

# ROCHESTER HISTORY

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## INDIAN ALLAN'S MILLS

BY BLAKE MCKELVEY

It was just one hundred fifty years ago that the first mills were erected on the site where the city of Rochester stands today. Unfortunately the venturesome builders and proprietors, unable to look ahead through the years, could not see what the future held in store for their millsite; discouraged by a slack trade, they soon abandoned the enterprise, and after a few years the mills fell into decay. Luckily a sufficient number of first-hand records, and some fairly reliable traditions have been preserved so that we can, in this the sesquicentennial year, reconstruct at least a portion of the story of the mills erected by Ebenezer Allan at the Falls of the Genesee in the summer and late fall of 1789.

We of Rochester are prone to think of Allan's sawmill and gristmill as the flimsy forerunners of our diversified industries, but their origin and their function were of a different sort. The Mill Lot sold to Phelps and Gorham by the Indians at Buffalo Creek in July, 1788, was planned by the Indians as a means to help them bridge the chasm that separated the Indian from the white man's culture. The mills to be erected at the falls were to grind the grain produced by the Indians; with this stimulus at hand, the leaders of the tribesmen hoped to adjust their people to an agricultural way of life, and thus to enable them to live in peace and harmony with the white settlers soon to locate east of the Genesee River. This original purpose for the sale of the Mill Lot was for many causes never realized, and Allan's mills became, instead of a link

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between the cultures of white and red men, a useful outpost, for a few years, of the westward-moving New York-New England frontier.

### ALLAN AND HIS MILLS

Ebenezer, or "Indian," Allan was from many angles a dramatic and certainly a colorful figure—a man well suited to carry out the original purpose of the frontier millsite. Although as a Tory ranger he had earned a bad reputation among the settlers to the south and east, Allan had later operated for several years as a peaceful trader among the Indians along the Genesee River. He had two daughters by a Seneca wife, and his enterprising activity had made him a figure of some importance in the Indian community.<sup>1</sup> Allan had proved agreeable to the Phelps and Gorham purchase in the summer of 1788,<sup>2</sup> and before returning to New England Oliver Phelps chose this hardy frontiersman as the man to build and operate the mills at the falls of the Genesee.

It is uncertain whether the One-Hundred-Acre Tract was given as a reward for his co-operation in bringing the Indians to terms at Buffalo Creek, or as an inducement for Allan to undertake the expense of building the mills on such a distant and unsettled frontier. In any case, title was promised by the following Articles of Agreement:<sup>3</sup>

On 30 Sep. 1788: N. Gorham and O. Phelps & Co., by their agents Wm. Walker, Caleb Barton and Benj. Barton artticed to Ebenezer Allan the privilege of a grist mill and saw mill with lands sufficient for mill yards and roads to the same and likewise 100 acres of land adjoining the same; provided the said lands shall not interfere with or injure any carrying place, ferry or town plat which may hereafter be found advantageous to the Company. Always reserving one half of all mines and minerals which have or may hereafter be found on said lands, and to build a good grist mill and saw mill by the 1st of June next.

Allan may have doubted the possibility of making his mills a vital link between the Indians and the white men, for, Indian trader though he was, he had recently married Lucy Chapman, a white woman, thus aligning himself more definitely with the settlers' frontier. Indeed, Allan had already partially cleared and improved a

farm of 472 acres near the site of present Scottsville, and most of his few neighbors were his own relations, either by blood or marriage. Lucy's parents and her sister, married to Nicholas Miller, all resided in the vicinity, as did Allan's own sister and her husband, Christopher Dugan. Other settlers began to arrive in 1789, founding Canandaigua, Bloomfield, Hartford [Avon], and Northfield [Pittsford]—to mention but a few of the pioneer communities. Allan was able to sell his Scottsville farm to Peter Shaeffer late that year for \$2.50 an acre, a very good price for that day. Doubtless the prospect of an active trade with the growing settlements prompted Allan to transfer most of his interest to the millseat at the falls of the Genesee—thus taking his stand at an extreme outpost of the Genesee frontier.

Mr. Morley Turpin, ablest student of Allan's career, tells us that Allan built his sawmill in the summer of 1789, sawing timber for his gristmill, the frame of which was raised that November.<sup>4</sup> George H. Harris placed the date of the raising at November 12-13,<sup>5</sup> but unfortunately no original records fixing the exact date have survived. Orsamus Turner, writing in 1851 from notes gathered in part by Henry O'Reilly within fifty years of Allan's activities, supplied a fairly reliable account:<sup>6</sup>

Allan had erected the saw mill at the Falls, (now Rochester) in the summer previous, and had his timber out for the grist mill. The money that he realized for his farm, enabled him to push forward his enterprise. The grist mill was raised the fore-part of winter. The frame was 26 by 30, of heavy timber. All the able bodied white men in the Genesee valley were invited to the raising—and they numbered fourteen all told. It took them two days. A trading boat happened to enter the mouth of the river, while they were raising, some rum was procured, and the backwoodsmen had a dance in the mill, and a rejoicing at the prospect of something better to prepare meal for their bread than the stump mortar.

The first original record of an actual visit to the millseat has been uncovered by Mr. Turpin among the few known papers of Samuel Street. We are grateful for the privilege of reproducing this letter, especially since it reveals an uncertainty in the minds of the

Phelps and Gorham associates concerning the proper developments to be undertaken here. No reply is at hand, but the fact that Allan was encouraged to continue the construction and operation of the mills, as shown below, indicates that Oliver Phelps decided to waive the right to withdraw Allan's claim on the technicality to be found in his failure to complete the mills by the first of June. Allan's enterprise in his pioneer harvest field at Scottsville, as well as at the millsite at the falls, was justly appreciated by the frontier trader, Samuel Street.<sup>7</sup>

Genesee 22d Aug. 1789

Dr. Sir

I have not cross'd to Mr. Allens Mills, but have made enquiry and do not find any Intervale or extraordinary land near where it stands and as it will, in some measure, draw the attention of settlers in that quarter and open the way for extending the settlement as soon as a further purchas is made from the natives. I do not apprehend that the Comp'y will loose any thing by allowing him a Hundred acres adjoining the mills. Mr. Allen has been at a great expense in digging and plowing his Race-way and his demand for his former expectations at the place he lives [his farm near present Scottsville] were by no means extravagant, all these matters considered, hope you will acquies in opinion with me.

I should have cross'd to the mills but the Millwrights were gone up to the harvest and no Canoe to be found at the Landing.

I am

with respect

Your Most Ob't

Humb'l Servant

Sam'l Street.

Oliver Phelps, Esq.r.

Very little is really known of the activities at Allan's mills during these early years. We do not know when the millstones were first set in motion, nor do we know when Allan finally moved in. But it is probable that by the spring or early summer of 1790 our first miller was fairly settled in his forest-bound mill on the site occupied by the Aqueduct Parking Station on the west side of Graves Street in downtown Rochester today.

A small natural raceway, which ran north past his mills, left the river just south of the cascades which then formed the upper falls, located about where Broad Street now crosses the river atop of the canal aqueduct. These cascades, which dropped the river about eighteen feet within a distance of fifty feet, were later blasted away to make room for two successive aqueducts and to provide an unobstructed flow of flood waters through the city. The small stream which Allan plowed open for a raceway possibly branched off from the river near the present western end of Court Street Bridge and ran north to tumble down an extension of the ledge of rock which formed the cascades. This ledge extended west just north of present Broad Street and, when levelled off, provided the moderate grade still to be found in Exchange Street and the other roadways between Main and Broad streets today. After dropping over this ledge, the stream or raceway ran northeast across the marshy lowland until it rejoined the river somewhere near the location of the western end of present Main Street Bridge. A small island was thus formed, similar to the larger island later formed there by the opening of the Rochester-Montgomery race tapping the river above the dam some distance upstream—it is on this larger island that the Erie Railroad station and the City Hall Annex stand today. Allan's mill stood on the mainland west of the raceway, and a low platform bridged the race and connected with a shanty built on the island as a cook house. The decentralized arrangement was probably adopted in order to protect the mills and the surrounding forest from the danger of fire. Except for an occasional Indian camping party, Allan's nearest neighbors, when he first occupied the mills, were Israel and Simon Stone at the site of present Pittsford, John Lusk at Irondequoit Landing, the Shaeffers on Allan's old farm at Scottsville, and possibly the Tory trader, Walker, at the mouth of the river. But no one of these was within a two-hour radius of the isolated millseat.

We cannot be certain of the number of Allan's household at the time. His two daughters were at school in Philadelphia, but their Indian mother may have accompanied Allan to the new home in the mill; Allan's white wife, Lucy, and her baby boy, born in 1788 and named Seneca Allan, doubtless lived at the mill in 1790. Lucy's sister's husband, Nicholas Miller, a millwright by trade, was probably engaged during the period when the gristmill was being con-

structed, and it may have been under his direction that the two millstones were prepared from rock dug out of a nearby cliff.

The expense of building and operating these frontier mills was apparently very considerable. At least the only reliable records we have of these early days relate to debts contracted by Allan in 1790. In July he negotiated a loan of £634 from Colonel John Butler, the Niagara Tory trader, giving him as security a mortgage on the mill lot,<sup>8</sup> a transaction which suggests the value then placed on Allan's site.\* Allan's requirements were so great that he was forced to journey to Canandaigua, the newly established headquarters of the Phelps and Gorham interests, to secure supplies or credit in August, and again in September. Two musty old notes still preserved in Canandaigua record those transactions and reveal that Allan was likewise picking up orders for flour; but the reference to interest, written on the bottom of the second note in another hand, may indicate a failure to make the intended delivery.<sup>9</sup>

[Eben Allan Note]

Canandaigua Augt. 11, 1790. For Value rece'vd I promise to pay  
Oliver Phelps Esq. on order the sum of ten pounds lawful money  
of New England on demand with Interest  
£10

E Allan

[Capt. Allan's Note \$25—16 Sept, 90]

Canandaigua Sept the 16th 1790

For value received I promise to pay unto Israel Chapin  
twenty five dollars worth of good Merchantable flower at five  
Dollars per hundwt [?] Delivered at the Big Tree flatts by the  
first Day of May Next as witness my hand

E Allan

Attest. Nathan Perry

Interest to Sept 12 1792 to 19.2

\**Editor's Note:* Mr. Morley Turpin has lately explored more fully into the history of this interesting transaction. The mortgage was first registered in 1799 at Nassau [Niagara on the Lake] in a British court, and in June, 1792, it was recorded at Canandaigua by Nathaniel Gorham, Clerk of Ontario County. Payment was to be made on or before July 1, 1793, but before that date Allan had disposed of his title to Barton. Butler's wish to clear himself of Governor Simcoe's charges that he was aiding the Yankee settlements on the frontier may have led him to "forget" this mortgage at that time, and his death in 1796 may have silenced the claim.

Apparently Oliver Phelps was sufficiently interested in the project to pay Allan a visit as well as to extend him credit, for the following letter, probably the first written from the site of Rochester, was dispatched to him in September:<sup>10</sup>

At my mills Septembour 23th 1790

Dear Sir

I thank you for you Generous friendship and Cander. While you was in this Country, and wish to have it in my power to make you sensible how much I am your humble servant— and shall wait on you next Jenewary—A few days after you left this plase my Brother arived here in order to settle in this Country so I beg that you would be so good as to return the notes to me again, and not giv them out of your hands by no means—and in so doing you will much oblige your sincere

friend E Allan

Judg Phelps

It is probable that Allan's borrowings at this time were not prompted so much by his milling activities as by his interest in trade and land speculations in the vicinity of Mt. Morris. Some time after Christopher Dugan and family joined him at the mills, in 1790 or 1791, Allan removed to his Mt. Morris location and committed the care of the mills to Dugan. At least one person, John H. Jones, an Indian trader and brother of Horatio Jones, the noted captive, was disappointed to discover Allan's departure, for he lamented this misfortune in a diary entry made at the falls in December, 1791:<sup>11</sup>

The 8th. From thence [Berry's,] started in a canoe, went on [down the Genesee] about four miles, where we were obliged to heave out our canoe on acct. of ice. Carried our goods to Shaffer's. The 9th. from thence to the head of the rappid. The 10th, Thence to Mr. Duggen's at the falls of the Genesee, where we were greatly discouraged at hearing of Indian's [Allan?] departure from the mouth of the Genesee. There we remained that night lamenting the misfortunate surcumstance and being cordially entertained by Mr. Duggen and wife. The 11th, started for the Lake with a small pack of goods. Came to an Indian Camp

there and Bot an ottar £1,12/3, mind 8/, 8 muskrats & mink 10/.  
Total 2,10/ Paid for. Sold a blanket, a steond [stroud?] & 1¼  
yds. calico.

Allan had in fact been disappointed by the meager returns from his milling enterprise. The continuous threat of the spread of Indian hostilities from the Ohio to the New York frontier had diverted the tribesmen from farming and checked their trade at the mills. The refusal of the British to abandon their posts at Oswego and Niagara and their attempt to prohibit American trade on Lake Ontario seriously checked the use of the frontier mills by American settlers, who were, meanwhile, but very sparsely scattered over the Genesee Country. The favored trade routes for the next decade or so were east over the Seneca, Oswego, and Mohawk rivers and south by the Conhocton-Susquehanna Valley. Allan saw greater opportunities for trade along this latter route, and in March, 1792, sold his millsite to Benjamin Barton for £500, New York currency.<sup>12</sup>

#### ALLAN'S SUCCESSORS

There was a far-flung land-development scheme back of this transaction. Barton was associated with other speculators, including Robert Morris and his agent, Samuel Ogden, in the purchase during 1792 of the township lying between the Genesee River and Irondequoit Bay, now largely occupied by the eastern half of the city of Rochester. There Morris and his associates planned to establish a town at the head of Irondequoit Bay, and a commercial city, to be named Athens, on the east bank of the Genesee at the lower falls.<sup>13</sup> It was obviously necessary to check any rival enterprise at the Allan millsite. The One-Hundred-Acre Tract was therefore acquired by Barton, and its title was shortly turned over to Ogden, the active agent for the associated speculators. But Robert Morris's land speculations had become so vast that, when in 1793 bank failures in London constricted his credit, it became necessary to unload as much of his property as possible. Thus Charles Williamson was able in 1794 to acquire the Genesee Mill Lot for the Pulteney Estate.

During those uncertain years before the English agreed under Jay's Treaty to abandon the frontier posts, and before the Iroquois accepted the Pickering peace terms at Canandaigua in 1794, Christopher Dugan continued to occupy the millseat at the Genesee Falls.

But the situation was not entirely agreeable, and when Dugan heard that title had passed into the hands of Charles Williamson he addressed that gentleman as follows:<sup>14</sup>

Falls of Genesee, Aug 9, 1794

The mill erected by Ebenezer Allan, which I am informed you have purchased, is in a bad situation, much out of repair, and unless attention is paid to it, it will soon take its voyage to the Lake. I have resided here for several years, and kept watch and ward, without fee or recompense; and am pleased to hear that it has fallen into the hands of a gentleman who is able to repair it, and whose character is such that I firmly believe he will not allow an old man to suffer without reward for his exertions. I wish to have you come, or send some one to take care of the mill, as my situation is such as makes it necessary soon to remove. I am sir, with respect, your most

obedient humble servant

CHRISTOPHER DUGAN

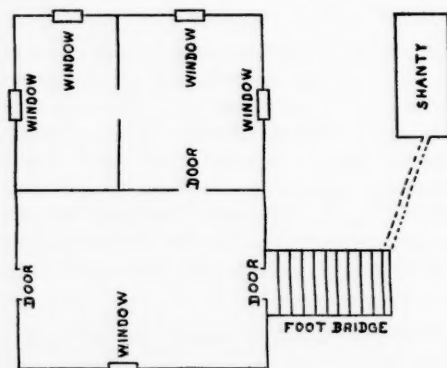
Charles Williamson, Esq.

Williamson was not slow to act in behalf of his newly acquired enterprise. In his Day Book, under date of September 25, 1794, we find an expenditure of \$41.20 which was paid to one H. MacKenzie to cover "his Expenses to Genesee Mills to get them repaired."<sup>15</sup> This sum was hardly sufficient to provide for the repair of the mills and probably MacKenzie's report was unfavorable. A year later Williamson paid out \$43.75 to one Alexander MacDonald for "Eben: Allen & Saw Mills Note of hand Given to You,"<sup>16</sup> but this obscure entry in the Day Book hardly indicates an active development of the millsite.

Apparently Dugan shortly removed, for the next report we have of the mills shows them abandoned and falling into decay. It is to young Libbeus Fish, who, with Josiah his father, visited the mouth of the Genesee River in the spring of 1795, that we are indebted for much of the knowledge we have of the appearance and some of the history of Allan's mills. Although these events and circumstances were not written down until after fifty years had slipped by, the recollections of Libbeus Fish and his sister Philothetta provide a plausible description of Allan's mills.<sup>17</sup>

There was no one living there at that time [spring of 1795] or between there and the Lake, eight miles distant. After arriving at the mill, and the Little Falls, we crossed over the river at the ford, above the Little Falls, and went on down on the east side, there being no path on the west side. We viewed the Falls from the east side, and near night arrived at the lake, and crossed the river. There were two families living there at that time, William Hinchey, and Frederick Hosmer. We stopped at the house of the latter, and staid a day or two. . . .

[That summer] a man by the name of Sprague was to take charge of Allan's Mill, and my father agreed to go down and board with him. Sprague's family consisted of himself and wife, three daughters and a son-in-law by the name of Fleming. I will now give you a description of our new home, Viz: the mill. It was probably 36 feet by 30 [Orsamus Turner reported the dimensions as 26 by 30], and was something like the ground floor given below:

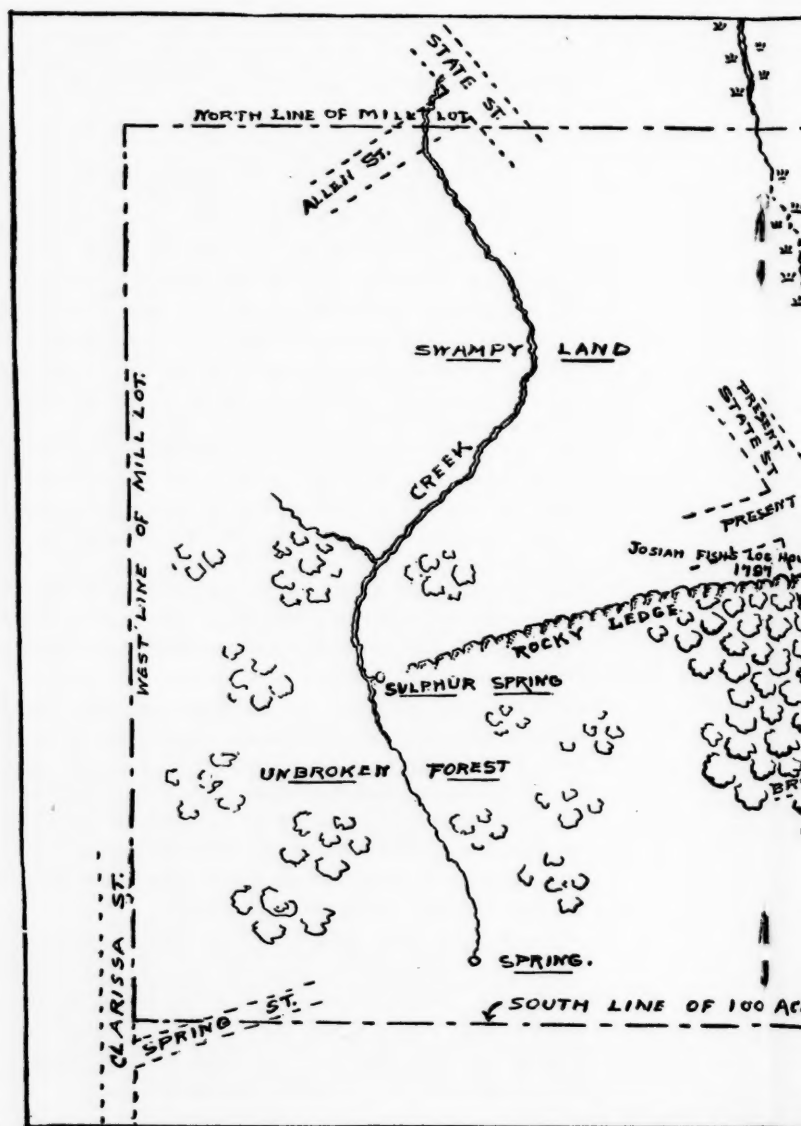


It was divided through the centre, east and west, by a board partition, and in like manner north and south. There was no glass and, to light the rooms it was necessary to open the shutters. There was no place to keep fire in the mill, and for that purpose there was a small shanty about four or five rods from the mill, on the bank of the river where the cooking was

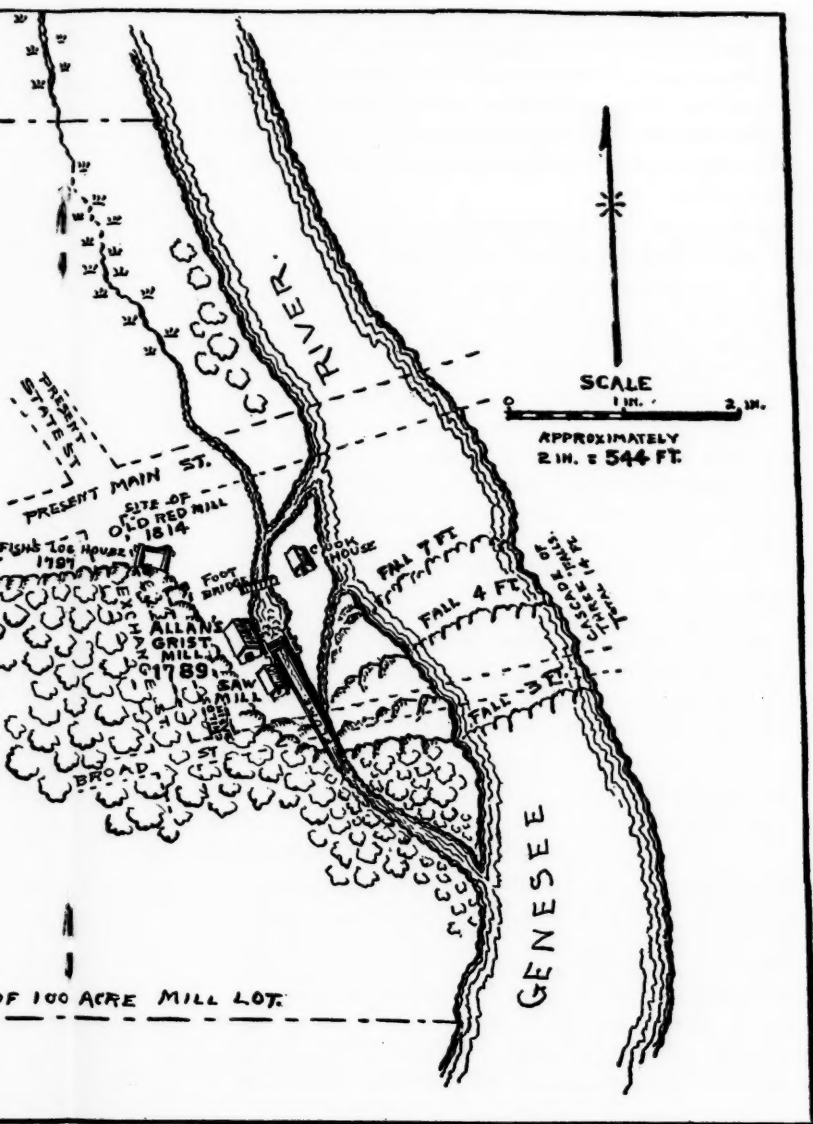
done, and we took our meals in the mill. To reach the mill there was a kind of a bridge from the mill to the shanty. The garrett was all in one room, and was the lodging-room for the boy and myself, and a pretty warm place in summer when I had the fever on. Soon after we arrived there, we were joined by an old hunter, named John Parks, and his dog. He was a singular man, and very rough and wore a long beard. He almost worshipped his dog, and would never take any food himself until he had given the dog the best. He made his home there, while I staid, and furnished most of the meat for the family, the largest share of which was raccoon meat, which was our constant food three times a day and the only food we had, except bread, and occasionally, cakes shortened and fried in raccoon oil. Sometimes we had tea without sugar or milk. Our drink was river water, and it was very warm. I had the ague and fever very hard. When it came on, I would go to the shanty and stand or sit around the fire until the chill went off, and the fever came on. Then I would walk as well as I could to the mill where I could lie down and no one can tell what I suffered but those who have tried it. The fever would last several hours. Then I would begin to sweat, and my clothes would be so wet, that I could wring the water out of them. . . . We continued here in this way until late in the fall when my father was about to start for Vermont for his family. . . .

In the fall [of 1796] . . . my father moved us [Mrs. Fish and five children] to the falls to take charge again of the Allan Mill, as Mr. Sprague had moved away. We continued to occupy the shanty and the mill that winter, and in the spring we built a house there of logs against a ledge of rocks, the rocks forming one side of the house. We had no chimney, and a hole in the roof served for an escape for the smoke. This was in the spring of 1797. The next spring my mother died.

[Philothetta Fish, sister of Libbeus, added a few details:] The next fall [1798] my sister, Sophia, was married to Mr. Frederic Hosmer. I remained in my father's family until he married Mrs. Holcomb. While I lived there, a sail vessel was built and launched on Lake Ontario. It was built by Eli Granger, who called it *Jemima*, after his wife who had that name.



Sketch of One-Hundred-Acre Tract, drawn by Mr. Morley Turpin and Major Wheeler. History of Rochester, Vol. 1: 154, and general.



Major Wheeler C. Case for the Rochester Historical Society and used in its Centennial : 154, and generously loaned for reproduction here.

Charles Williamson was a land promoter, full of ambition and optimism, and although he was already heavily involving his principals by expenditures at Williamsburg, Bath, Geneva, and Sodus Point, he could not permit the millsite to remain idle. In the second of his notable "Letters" describing the Genesee Country, written in 1797, Williamson revealed a clear understanding of the value of the Genesee millsite:<sup>18</sup>

The only part of the Genesee country, that seemed, until now to have escaped the general improvement, was that contiguous to the Genesee River, below Hartford or Canawagas [Avon]: a set of very good mills, however, had been built at the falls, and some settlers were to be found in the neighbourhood, on the fertile plains by the side of the river: but the idea of exposure to Indian depredations on a frontier is always sufficient to prevent the man of industry and property from settling. The luxuriance of the soil will not always tempt him. The moment, however, the western posts were given up to the United States, and this part of the country rendered safe, the industrious settlers turned their attention to the lands west of the river; and they now bid fair to prove one of the best settlements in the western country.

Not only did Williamson engage Josiah Fish to operate the mills, but it is said that he spent five or six hundred dollars on their repair.<sup>19</sup> In the fall of 1797, Charles Sholl, one of Williamson's agents, visited the mills and made the following report:<sup>20</sup>

Chas<sup>s</sup> Williamson Esq<sup>r</sup>

Genesee Mills Sept<sup>r</sup> 4th 1797

Sir,—

I arrived here the Second Inst and Examined the Mills the Race &c, and find that there can Sufficient water be brought down the Present Race to Supply the Mills as they at Present Stand with about 12 or 15 Days Labor to make the Race wider,—as to a new Race it would answer the present purpose its Length would be about fifty Perches the head and fall about 21 feet—a very good Plan to take it out of the River in which more than a Sufficient Quantity of water may be Brought to Turn any kind of water work if Set in the

Proper Place but as the Mills now stand a new Race would be more injurious than Beneficial—I can in a short time put the present Mills in Such Repair that they will do very well for at least the space of four years—the Grist mill works are Tolerable Good but much out of Repair—the Saw mill is also very badly Constructed but I think I can make it Saw about 1000 feet pr day—

You will please to Send a Mason if you Possibly can to build the foundation of the Saw Mill &c as it cannot Possibly do without

Mr. Fish wished to Know whether you will have a Chimney bui[l]t in the Mill house, or have a new house built You will Please to advise me what you would wish to have done if the above statement dose not meet your approbation I am Sir &c

Cha<sup>s</sup> Sholl

Other land promoters were by this time actively interested in the region around the mouth of the Genesee. A 20,000-acre tract, sold by Phelps and Gorham in 1790 to a company of Springfield and Northampton gentlemen, extended along the west bank of the river and included much of the land covered by the western half of the city today. Allan's One-Hundred-Acre Tract was expressly reserved from this larger tract, and was "to be located in as near a square form as the winding of the river would permit, commencing at the center of the mill and extending an equal distance up and down the river, then back so far as to contain 100 acres in the above form." When in 1796 King and Granger began their settlements, it became necessary to survey both the larger tract and the mill plot. Augustus Porter recalled some of the circumstances of the survey in his narrative written down fifty years later:<sup>21</sup>

In May of this year 1797, I went to this 20,000 acre tract, and after first running out the Allan 100 acres, according to the the description above given, proceeded to survey it into farm lots, excepting a portion about Hanford's landing, which was laid into village lots.

Life at Genesee Falls was becoming fuller and more active. Neighbors were appearing a few miles off in every direction, notably

at King's Landing just below the lower falls. We wonder whether the wedding of Sophia Fish to Frederick Hosmer was performed in the accommodating old gristmill or in a more romantic setting at the brink of the falls. In any case, the old gristmill had become a vital community center. In due season, after Josiah Fish had brought his second wife to the mill, a son, John, was born in February, 1800—the first white child born on the site of Rochester.

### PROMINENT VISITORS

Since 1795 the frontier had been at peace. Accordingly the Genesee Country was attracting an increasing number of settlers, and a succession of curious visitors began to cross the state, some of them to visit the great falls of Niagara, and others to observe conditions on the American frontier. Only a few of them made their way down to the mouth of the Genesee River, but four of those who did find time for such a visit took occasion to record their observations, and we thus have a vivid picture of the last days of Indian Allan's mills.

The first of these articulate visitors was Le Comte de Colbert Maulevrier who kept a diary of his journey to Niagara in 1798. It was on October 6th that he came on horseback from Canandaigua by way of Glover Perrin's settlement and reached the ford over the river above the falls at the close of day.<sup>22</sup>

At seven o'clock I arrived at Mr. Williamson's mill [the old Allan grist mill]. The miller, Colonel [Josiah] Fish, was absent but I found at a little log house at least ten or twelve little boys and girls [several of them Colonel Fish's children] one of whom showed me to an even more dilapidated log house, without any roof, which he told me was the only stable. He also said that he had neither hay nor straw nor oats but only bran and corn. I asked him to give some to my horse and having nothing better with which to bed him down for the night, I cut a pile of the smaller branches from such bushes as I could find and brought them to him, which seemed to suit him very well.

On returning I found Mr. Fish who appeared to be, and I believe is, an excellent man, and who is, moreover, very oblig-

ing. I asked him whether I might not have a better lodging for myself. At nine o'clock he took me to a room in the mill where there was a bed, the appearance of which attracted my attention because of the many fleas which I found there, and which were sure to keep me awake all night. Besides, there were eight of us in that room, both men and women, and five or six in the adjoining room, all sleeping close together on feather beds on the floor. This crowding was occasioned by the presence of two families on their way to York [later Toronto], in Canada, who were waiting at Mr. Fish's for the arrival of a schooner which was to take them.

There is a very frequent communication between this place and Upper Canada, especially with York, which is the seat of government. They export from the part of America around the Chenessee River and Lake Ontario, flour which is bought for \$7.00 a barrel and sold at from \$10.00 to \$14.00, and cattle on which they make about a hundred per cent profit. . . . Oswego, at the southeast end of the lake, the important Great Soduss Bay, the port of entry of the Chenessee, and Niagara are the harbors on the American side. Lake Ontario is one hundred and eighty miles long, seventy-two wide, a great expanse, with not a reef or island to interrupt its navigation.

On the 7th, after having a poor breakfast, Colonel Fish took me to the falls. The first, which is [blank space in the manuscript] is, properly speaking, only a rapid with about eighteen feet of fall over a stretch of fifty feet. The accompanying sketch gives an idea, as I saw it, of the second fall which is the highest. In the winter, when the river is swollen, it forms but a single sheet of water from bank to bank and then it must be very beautiful. Though there was but little water, it pleased me, nevertheless. A half mile farther on is a third fall with a perpendicular fall drop of about twenty feet. There was so little water and it made such a narrow fall that I paused but a moment and continued along the bank of the river by a very difficult road and arrived at the last fall a half mile farther on. The second drawing gives an idea of it. The perpendicular height is perhaps about fifty feet.

After having made the sketch, we re-climbed the perpendicular bank of the river and returned to the road which runs from the mill to the place where the boats have unloaded for the last two years [the Upper Landing or Falltown, later Hanford's Landing, settled in 1796]. They began a settlement here but sickness carried off five of the new settlers and the news of their death kept several families [from] coming here from Connecticut.

After drinking a little grog, my companion and I returned along the road to the mill where, after having eaten some bread and cheese, I mounted my horse at half past one and rode up back the Chenessee and arrived at five o'clock at the house of a man named Shavers [Peter Shaeffer, on the farm near Scottsville bought from Indian Allan in 1789].

The second of these articulate visitors, the Englishman, John Maude, reached the falls in August, 1800, and made extensive notes of the falls and the neighboring settlements. But Maude's description is so well known that we need quote here only that portion in which he described the state of the mills.<sup>23</sup>

As Colonel Fish the miller, had not those accommodations which I expected, not even a stable, I was obliged to proceed to Mr. King's, at the Genesee Landing . . . where I got a good breakfast on wild pigeons, &c. . . . [After visiting the falls in company with some of the settlers who at this date still occupied King's Landing, Maude] joined Col. Fish at the Mills. These Mills were built in 1789, by a Mr. Allen, called Indian Allen, from his long residence among the Aborigines of this country, who on condition of building them, had a tract of one hundred acres adjoining given to him by Mr. Phelps, the Mills to remain Allen's property.

The Grist Mill is very ill constructed; it is erected too near the bed of the River, and the race so improperly managed, that it is dry in Summer, and liable to back water in Winter. It contains but one pair of stones, made from the stone of a neighbouring quarry, and which is found to be very suitable for this purpose. This Mill is not at present able to grind more than ten bushels a day; were it in good order, it would grind sixty.

This was the first Mill erected in the Genesee Country. It was not only resorted to by the inhabitants of Bradloe, Caledonia, Genesee Landing, &c. but by those living so far distant as Canandaigua. It is now almost entirely neglected, in consequence of being so much out of repair; and the settlers on the W. of the River are obliged to resort to the Mill at Rundicut, which from Bradloe is at least eighteen miles, besides having a river to cross.

The Saw Mill is already ruined. Indian Allen soon after the erection of these Mills sold the property to Mr. Ogden of Newark, New Jersey, who re-sold them to Captain Williamson, the present possessor. Captain W. perceiving the value of the property, proposes to build a new and much larger Mill, a few feet higher than the present one, it will be then out of the way of the ice and backwater; and by taking the race from a more favourable part of the River, where in the driest seasons the channel has six feet [of] water close along shore, it will have a never-failing supply of water: and as, in consequence of the Falls, there must be a portage at this place, the race is to serve the purpose of a canal, not only to float logs to the Saw-Mills, but for the river craft to discharge and take in their lading.

A third visitor, the American painter, John Vanderlyn, came in 1802, but did not make a record of his observations at the time. Years later Robert Gorman took down the account of Vanderlyn's journey to Niagara, during which he visited the Genesee Falls. Possibly his memory had become dim, for we find little that is recognizable in his account, other than the general decay that was characterizing all the settlements near the mouth of the Genesee at that date.<sup>24</sup>

[While at Canandaigua] Mr. Morris highly commended the idea of the artist to visit Genesee Falls *prior* to Niagara. "for," he remarked, "after seeing the latter, Genesee is hardly worth a glance. "But," said he, "it is a place which will be known hereafter, for there is a capital water power."

The travellers turned off to Genesee Falls, now the site of the city of Rochester. The germ of the present [1850?] thriving town with its dozen giant mills, consisted of a solitary farm house and a primitive grist mill. The Genesee River falling over three

ledges formed three distinct falls. . . . Mr. Vanderlyn and comrade found homely but bounteous entertainment at the farm house spoken of, and as a farther act of hospitality their host got up a raccoon hunt by torchlight, which proved highly successful.

From the junction of the cross road to Genesee Falls and the main route, to the next inn was twenty miles, twelve of it being unbroken forest.

Finally in 1809 the millsite was found "in perfect ruins." This last visitor signs himself as "T. C.," and Mr. Turpin identifies him as the Thomas Cooper who first visited the Genesee Country in 1794.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately his account of his earliest visit does not describe Allan's mills, and if he came again in 1796 and saw the mills in operation, no published account has come to light. Luckily Mr. George P. Humphrey discovered the journal of the 1809 visit in the rare *Port Folio* for 1810, a Philadelphia publication of which Cooper later became assistant editor, and reprinted it in Rochester in 1915. Cooper remarks upon reaching the falls,<sup>26</sup>

When Col. Wardrop and I were here in 1796 [1794?] there was still a mill, which is now [1809] fallen down and in perfect ruins; but it appears to me the best site for a mill I ever saw. It commands the whole of the Genesee River; it is perfectly secure from being washed away; and large boats might easily unload in the mill itself. As the falls begin here, every other situation below requires a portage. The rapids do not obstruct the navigation so far as this mill seat.

There were several reasons for the backward trend of settlement on the lower Genesee. Trade developments waited upon an increase in the number of settlers throughout the Genesee Country. Meanwhile the routes to the south and to the east were favored over the Genesee outlet, partly because the latter's market was at the time more limited. An energetic promoter might have advanced the Genesee millsite more rapidly, but Charles Williamson had his hands full with other enterprises. In 1800, Williamson was himself removed from his agency for the Pulteney Estate because of his too lavish expenditures. His successor, Robert Troup, naturally hesitated to promote still another costly project. Pressure from England for a

more rapid sale of the various parts of the Estate prompted an inventory in 1802 which appraised the One-Hundred-Acre millsite at \$1,040.<sup>27</sup>

### ROCHESTER BUYS THE MILLSEAT

Among the settlers who were then trekking through the forest from the east and south into the Genesee Country were some substantial investors, seeking promising commercial and industrial sites. Three gentlemen of this sort rode horseback up the Susquehanna from Maryland in 1800, each choosing a desirable piece of land for purchase. The eldest of the three, Colonel Nathaniel Rochester, bought a farm and millseat at the site of present Dansville, purchasing the mill from David Sholl who had erected it there some five years before. It is interesting to speculate on the possibility that Charles Sholl may have been in the Canaseraga valley with his brother (?) at the time of Rochester's visit, for in that case the latter must then have heard of the much more remarkable millseat on the lower Genesee visited by Charles Sholl only three years before. In any case, Rochester returned three years later, accompanied as before by his Maryland friends, Colonel William Fitzhugh and Major Charles Carroll. After looking over many prospective sites, the three friends visited the Genesee millsite, probably in November of 1803, and agreed to join forces for its purchase. The following contract, signed on November 8, 1803, reveals the terms of the agreement:<sup>28</sup>

A CONTRACT, Made the eighth day of November in the year One Thousand Eight Hundred and three Between Charles Carrol, William Fitzhugh and Nathaniel Rochester of the County of Washington and State of Maryland, Esquires of the First Part, And Sir William Pulteney of the County of Middlesex, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, Baronet, by John Johnston his Attorney, by virtue of a Letter of Substitution, bearing date the first day of February, in the year one thousand eight hundred and two, from ROBERT TROUP, Esquire, the Attorney, bearing date the 29th day of July, in the year one thousand eight hundred one, and Recorded in the Secretary's Office of the State of New York, in Lib: Deeds endorsed M.R.N. page 409, &c. of the Second Part, as follows, (to wit) First--

The said Sir William Pulteney agrees to sell to the said Charles Carrol, William Fitzhugh, Nathaniel Rochester all that certain [Tract] of Land in Township Number one in the Short Range on the West side of the Genesee River in the County of Genesee (late Ontario) and State of New York being the tract commonly known and designated as the Genesee River fall Mill Lot and containing one hundred acres together with all the privileges and advantages of the waters thereon and the mills thereon erected.

SECONDLY—The said Charles Carrol, William Fitzhugh and Nathaniel Rochester agree to pay for the said tract of land and mills the sum of One thousand seven hundred and fifty dollars in manner following, (that is to say) the sum of three hundred and fifty dollars on the first of May next and the remainder in four equal annual payments thereafter with interest from the first day of May next.

THIRDLY—The said Sir William Pulteney agrees that immediately after the full payment of the said Purchase Money, in manner above particularly appointed, he, the said Sir William Pulteney will execute, and cause to be delivered to the said Charles Carrol, William Fitzhugh and Nathaniel Rochester a good and sufficient WARRANTY DEED for the said tract of land and mills, with the appurtenances.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the said party of the First Part, and the said Sir William Pulteney, by his said Attorney, John Johnston by virtue of the letter of Substitution aforesaid, have hereunto set their Hands and Seals, on the day in the year above written.

Sealed and Delivered in  
the Presence of  
John Taylor

William Pulteney, L. S.  
by his atty J. Johnston  
Ch. Carroll, L. S.  
Wm. Fitzhugh, L. S.  
N. Rochester, L. S.

But Rochester, Fitzhugh, and Carroll, the new owners, did not intend to invest heavily in their new venture until the growth of trade in that direction should promise larger returns. The sawmill had been washed out by a spring flood before Maude's visit in 1800.

The gristmill was suffering from storm and neglect, and Josiah Fish, the last occupant, probably abandoned the millseat in 1804 shortly after its sale to Rochester. It must have been at that date that the millstones were removed for service in a succession of small mills on Allyn's Creek. Here they were discovered a half-century later, and through the efforts of J. M. Hatch and the Junior Pioneer Association they were, in 1860, brought back to the site of their original activity.<sup>29</sup>

Nathaniel Rochester had permitted his millsite to lie neglected until 1812, when its development was at last undertaken with energy. Growth was rapid after the close of the war of 1812, and especially after the opening of the Erie Canal. By 1860 a city of 48,204 had grown up at the old millsite, and the historic relics were given an honored place in the rear of the Court House. In 1873 they were placed as foundations for lampposts in front of the new City Hall. In 1896 further expansion compelled their removal, and they were mounted in an inner wall of the new Court House, where they can be seen on the second floor today, the only physical remains of the milling enterprise which was the first attempt of white men to develop the site of Rochester, just one hundred and fifty years ago.

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*Editor's Note:* Readers interested in the early beginnings of Rochester will be glad to know that Mr. Morley Turpin, Archivist in charge of the Local History Collection of the University of Rochester, has for several years been working on a biography of Ebenezer Allan. When finished his study should provide a definitive life of our colorful pioneer. Meanwhile we are grateful to Mr. Turpin for his generous assistance in the preparation of this brief paper.

## NOTES

1. Morley B. Turpin, "Ebenezer Allan in the Genesee Country," Rochester Historical Society, *Publications*, XI: 313-338. We are indebted to Mr. Turpin's excellent article for many of the details not otherwise supported in this account.
2. Blake McKelvey, "Historic Aspects of the Phelps and Gorham Treaty of July 4-8, 1788," *Rochester History*, January, 1939.
3. Rochester Historical Society, *Publications*, XI: 327.
4. Turpin, *op. cit.*, p. 325.
5. See his account in William F. Peck, *Semi-Centennial History of the City of Rochester* (Syracuse, 1884), pp. 78-79.
6. Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham's Purchase and Morris Reserve* (Rochester, 1851), p. 405.
7. Samuel Street to Oliver Phelps, August 22, 1789, MS. (University of Rochester Library).
8. Turpin, *op. cit.*, p. 328.
9. Oliver Phelps Papers, MSS. (Ontario County Historical Society Library).
10. E. Allan to Judge Phelps, September 30, 1790, MSS. (Ontario County Historical Society Library).
11. George H. Harris, "Extract from the Diary of John H. Jones," MSS.
12. Henry O'Reilly Documents, MSS. No. 2492.
13. Phelps & Gorham Purchase, Township 14, Range 17, Map of 1792. Photostat copy in the Rochester Public Library.
14. Orsamus Turner, *op. cit.*, p. 267.
15. "Williamson Day Book," MS., Sept. 25, 1794.
16. *Ibid.*, Nov. 27, 1795.
17. Rochester Historical Society, *Publications*, VI: 320-321, 322-323.
18. [Charles Williamson] *Description of the Settlement of the Genesee Country, in the State of New York. In a Series of Letters from a Gentleman to his Friend* (New York, 1799). The quotation is taken from the reprint of this valuable booklet in the *Documentary History of the State of New York* (Albany, 1850) II:663.
19. Rochester Historical Society, *Publications*, X:151.
20. Charles Sholl to Charles Williamson, Esquire, Big Tree, MS., Osgood Collection, No. 246.
21. "Narrative of Early Years in the Life of Judge Augustus Porter," Buffalo Historical Society, *Publications*, VII: 314-135.
22. Le Comte de Colbert Maulevrier, "The Genesee Country in 1798," translated by R. W. G. Vail, Rochester Historical Society, *Publications*, XIV: 157-165.
23. John Maude, *Visit to the Falls of Niagara in 1800* (London, 1826), pp. 106, 113-114. See a more extensive quotation of Maude's notes on the lower Genesee in the Rochester Historical Society, *Publications*, XVII.
24. "John Vanderlyn's Niagara Visit in 1802," Buffalo Historical Society, *Publications*, XV: 167.
25. Thomas Cooper, *Some Information Respecting America* (London, 1794). See also two excellent biographical studies of this dramatic personality: Dumas Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* (New Haven, 1925), pp. 217; Maurice Kelley, "Additional Chapters on Thomas Cooper," *The Maine Bulletin*, XXXIII, (August, 1930), p. 57.
26. T. C., *A Ride to Niagara in 1809* (Rochester, 1915), p. 27.
27. Elizabeth Turner, "Settlement of Western New York from the End of the Revolution to 1825," (Master's Thesis, University of Rochester, 1934), MS. p. 71.
28. MS. in the Ontario County Historical Society Library.
29. Rochester Historical Society, *Publications*, X: 152-153.

